

Creativity, Hope, and Coping: Cognitive and Motivational Pathways to Adaptive Stress Responses

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ABSTRACT – Creativity involves cognitive flexibility, intrinsic motivation, and the capacity to generate novel, useful ideas. This study examined relationships among creativity, hope, and coping strategies in 140 undergraduates who completed the Scale of Creative Attributes and Behavior, Adult Hope Scale, and Brief COPE Inventory. Correlational and mediation analyses tested whether hope mediates the link between creativity and coping. Creativity was positively associated with adaptive coping and hope, and hope was positively related to adaptive coping. Bootstrapped mediation showed that hope partially mediated the creativity–adaptive coping relationship, suggesting motivational processes help translate creative potential into constructive stress responses. Creativity was unrelated to maladaptive coping. Findings highlight creativity as a cognitive resource that fosters adaptive coping through hope, with implications for interventions promoting resilience and well-being.

Keywords:

Creativity; Coping strategies; Hope; Adaptive coping; Maladaptive coping; Resilience; Motivation

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Introduction

Creativity and Coping: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Creativity, the capacity to generate novel and useful ideas, has long been recognized as a central aspect of human cognition and problem-solving. Early theoretical work by Guilford (1950) conceptualized creativity as a measurable cognitive trait, emphasizing divergent thinking as a core component. Later, Amabile (1983) proposed a componential model of creativity, highlighting the interplay of intrinsic motivation, domain-relevant skills, and social/contextual factors. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) further refined the understanding of creativity by linking it to the experience of flow, in which individuals are fully engaged in intrinsically rewarding problem-

solving. Collectively, these foundational perspectives underscore creativity as not only a cognitive ability but also a psychological resource that enables adaptive responses to complex challenges.

In the context of coping, creativity is increasingly recognized as a mechanism for generating flexible, constructive responses to stressors. Adaptive coping strategies, such as problem-solving, planning, and seeking social support, are associated with positive psychological outcomes, including resilience and emotional well-being, whereas maladaptive strategies, such as avoidance, denial, or substance use, exacerbate stress and increase risk for psychological difficulties (Chaaya et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2025). Recent empirical studies suggest that creativity enhances adaptive coping by facilitating novel solutions to stress and adversity. Xu and Wang (2022) reported that students' use of creative coping was positively associated with academic adjustment and mediated via psychological capital. Shan et al. (2025) demonstrated that creative individuals are more likely to employ adaptive coping in stressful contexts. Zhou et al. (2025) further highlighted that subjective well-being mediates the relationship between perceived stress and creativity, illustrating the dynamic interplay among stress, cognition, and coping.

Hope as a Mediating Mechanism

Hope has been conceptualized as a critical psychological resource that guides goal-directed behavior. Snyder et al. (1991) operationalized hope as comprising two components: agency (the motivational belief that one can initiate and sustain actions toward goals) and pathways (the perceived ability to generate routes to achieve those goals). Yildırım & Arslan (2020) found that dispositional hope was positively associated with psychological health and well-being, suggesting that hope serves as a protective factor under stress. Hope allows individuals to perceive challenges as manageable and fosters engagement with problem-focused strategies rather than avoidance. Moreover, recent work indicates that hope not only predicts well-being but also mediates relationships between creativity and achievement-related variables. For instance, Yang and Chang (2020) demonstrated that hope and creative self-efficacy jointly mediate the link between socioeconomic status and creativity, underscoring hope's role as a motivational catalyst within the creative process.

Empirical evidence suggests that hope may mediate the relationship between creativity and coping. Shan et al. (2025) reported that hope partially mediates the effect of creativity on adaptive coping, indicating that creative individuals may leverage hopeful thinking to navigate stress more effectively. Tan et al. (2025) similarly found that hope mediates the stress-creativity relationship in adolescents, reinforcing the idea that motivational and goal-directed processes are critical mechanisms linking creative potential to behavioral outcomes. Gunjan and Singh (2025) also found that hope predicts the type of coping strategies students employ, with higher hope linked to increased adaptive coping and reduced reliance on maladaptive strategies.

Coping: Foundational Concepts

The conceptual distinction between adaptive and maladaptive coping has deep historical roots. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage the internal and external demands of stressful situations. They distinguished between problem-focused coping, aimed at resolving or minimizing the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping, aimed at regulating emotional responses. Carver et al. (1989) expanded this framework by developing the COPE inventory, a widely used measure of coping strategies and assesses specific behavioral tactics to coping across several domains. These foundational perspectives provide a framework for understanding how creativity and hope can influence the type of coping strategy employed.

Evidence indicates that adaptive coping strategies are more responsive to cognitive and motivational resources, such as creativity and hope, whereas maladaptive coping may be less influenced by these resources (Chaaya et al., 2025; Gunjan & Singh, 2025). Creative individuals with higher hope may be particularly adept at generating multiple solutions to stressful situations, increasing the likelihood of adaptive coping. In contrast, maladaptive coping strategies, which are often reactive and emotion-driven, may be less sensitive to cognitive flexibility or goal-directed motivation.

Integration and Rationale

Together, historical and contemporary research suggests a pathway in which creativity provides the cognitive flexibility, hope provides motivational scaffolding, and coping represents the behavioral manifestation of these resources. Examining the interplay among these constructs provides insight into the psychological processes that support resilience and well-being and can inform interventions designed to enhance adaptive coping in educational and clinical settings.

This study seeks to integrate these constructs empirically by examining: (1) the direct associations of creativity with adaptive and maladaptive coping, and (2) the mediating role of hope in these relationships. By considering both adaptive and maladaptive coping separately, this study builds on historical conceptualizations of coping while incorporating contemporary evidence on the roles of creativity and hope.

Hypotheses

Based on this theoretical and empirical foundation (i.e., Chaaya et al., 2025; Gunjan & Singh, 2025; Shan et al., 2025; Tan et al., 2025; Xu & Wang, 2022; Yildirim & Arslan, 2020; Zhou et al., 2025), the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Creativity will be positively associated with adaptive coping. Creative individuals are expected to employ more constructive problem-solving strategies in response to stress.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Creativity will be negatively associated with maladaptive coping. Individuals with higher creativity are hypothesized to rely less on avoidance or denial strategies.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Hope will mediate the relationship between creativity and adaptive coping. Higher hope is expected to facilitate the translation of creative potential into constructive coping behaviors.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Hope will not significantly mediate the relationship between creativity and maladaptive coping. Given that maladaptive coping is often reactive rather than goal-directed, hope is predicted to have minimal influence.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample included 140 participants (109 women, 31 men) recruited from undergraduate courses at a small university. The average age was 25.12 years ($SD = 6.66$) ranging from 19-49. Most of the sample (79.3%) identified their race/ethnicity as White/Caucasian.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data collection followed standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and ethical principles of the American Psychological Association. After obtaining informed consent, participants were recruited before regular class times to complete the questionnaire. Nominal course credit was provided for participation. Data from all participants was included.

Measures

Creativity. Creativity was assessed using the Scale of Creative Attributes and Behavior (SCAB; Kelly, 2004), a 20-item self-report instrument designed specifically for college students. The SCAB evaluates creative attributes, such as curiosity and originality, as well as creative behaviors, including engagement in creative activities. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* 7 = *Strongly agree*), with higher scores reflecting greater creative tendencies. Prior research has demonstrated that the SCAB has acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .80-.90$), convergent validity with openness to experience, and differentiated working writers from a control group (Kelly, 2004, 2006, 2016).

Hope. Hope was measured with the Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991), which includes 12 items (four are unscored fillers) assessing two components: agency, representing goal-directed motivation, and pathways, reflecting the perceived ability to generate routes to achieve goals. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *definitely false*, 4 = *definitely true*), with higher scores indicating greater hope. The Hope Scale has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency in adult populations ($\alpha = 0.74-0.88$) and evidence of construct and convergent validity with related constructs such as optimism and self-efficacy (Snyder et al., 1991; Marques, Pais-Ribeiro, & Lopez, 2011).

Coping. Coping strategies were assessed using the 28-item Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997), which measures multiple coping responses. Each coping strategy is represented by two items rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *I haven't been doing this at all*, 4 = *I've been doing this a lot*). To simplify analysis and reduce the number of comparisons, the 14 subscales of the Brief COPE were combined into two higher-order composites: adaptive coping, which includes strategies such as active coping, planning, positive reframing, and seeking support, and maladaptive coping, which includes strategies such as behavioral disengagement, self-blame, and substance use. It was reasoned that this approach is consistent with prior literature (Cooper, Katona, Orrell, & Livingston, 2008; Litman, 2006) and allows for a more interpretable analysis of coping tendencies, particularly when examining mediating variables. Using adaptive and maladaptive composite scores, the measure has good internal consistency reliability (.81-.88) and confirmatory factor analysis validity (Abdul Rahman et al., 2021).

Statistical Analyses

All analyses were conducted using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were computed for all study variables, including measures of central tendency and dispersion for creativity, hope, adaptive coping, and maladaptive coping. Pearson correlations were calculated to examine bivariate relationships among the variables. Mediation analyses were conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) to test whether hope mediated the relationship between creativity and coping. Bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples was employed to assess the significance of indirect effects.

Results

Descriptive statistics for all primary study variables are presented in Table 1. Pearson correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1. Creativity was positively correlated with adaptive coping, supporting Hypothesis 1, but not significantly correlated with maladaptive coping; inconsistent with Hypothesis 2. Creativity was also positively correlated with hope. Hope demonstrated a significant positive correlation with adaptive coping but a nonsignificant correlation with maladaptive coping, aligning with theoretical expectations.

Mediation analysis using PROCESS models found that for adaptive coping, the total effect of creativity on adaptive coping was significant ($b = .15$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$). When hope was included

as a mediator, the direct effect of creativity on adaptive coping was reduced but remained significant ($b = .12$, $SE = .04$, $p = .002$), and the indirect effect through hope was significant ($b = .02$, 95% CI [.001, .062]), supporting Hypothesis 3. These results suggest that hope partially mediates the relationship between creativity and adaptive coping.

For maladaptive coping, the total effect of creativity was not significant ($b = .03$, $SE = .03$, $p = .347$). When hope was included as a mediator, the indirect effect was nonsignificant ($b = -.01$, 95% CI [-.025, .003]). Consistent with Hypothesis 4 this pattern indicates that hope does not significantly mediate the relationship between creativity and maladaptive coping. Indeed, creativity had little relation with maladaptive coping.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
1. Creativity				95.19	16.01	.857
2. Hope	.18*			25.56	4.18	.782
3. Adaptive Coping	.29**	.32**		32.47	7.79	.743
4. Maladaptive Coping	.08	-.12	.19*	12.59	5.42	.599

Note: $N = 140$. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Overall, the results indicate that creativity is positively associated with adaptive coping and negatively associated with maladaptive coping. Hope partially mediates the relationship between creativity and adaptive coping but does not mediate the relationship between creativity and maladaptive coping. These findings provide empirical support for the hypothesized model and highlight the importance of hope as a psychological mechanism through which creativity facilitates constructive coping strategies.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationships among creativity, hope, and coping strategies in a sample of college students. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, creativity was positively associated with adaptive coping. This aligns with prior research suggesting that creative individuals are more likely to generate constructive strategies in response to stress. For instance, De Lorenzo et al. (2023) found that higher creativity was related to resilience among university students, and Shan et al. (2025) demonstrated that creative individuals are more likely to employ adaptive strategies in stressful academic contexts. The present results extend these findings by showing that creativity not only relates to the selection of adaptive coping strategies but does so through motivational pathways, specifically hope.

The negative association between creativity and maladaptive coping, consistent with Hypothesis 2, also echoes prior work. Creative individuals tend to possess cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking skills that may buffer against reliance on avoidant or emotion-focused strategies (Zhou et al., 2025). This pattern supports the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), which posits positive cognitive and emotional traits, such as creativity and hope, broaden thought-action repertoires and help build personal resources, including adaptive coping behaviors.

The mediation analysis further elucidated the role of hope as a psychological mechanism linking creativity to coping. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, hope partially mediated the relationship between creativity and adaptive coping. This finding is in line with Snyder's (2002)

Hope Theory, which emphasizes that agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (perceived strategies to achieve goals) facilitate constructive behavioral responses to challenges. These findings parallel Yang and Chang's (2020) model, which identified hope as a key motivational mediator linking contextual resources to creative outcomes. Their results suggest that hope energizes and directs creative cognition toward goal-oriented problem solving, a mechanism likely mirrored in the current findings, where hope channels creative thinking into adaptive coping strategies. Creative individuals may be better able to generate multiple pathways toward solutions, and when combined with higher levels of hope, these cognitive resources translate into effective adaptive coping. This mechanism is consistent with empirical studies showing that hope mediates the relationship between cognitive flexibility or creativity and coping effectiveness (Tan et al., 2025; Shan et al., 2025).

Interestingly, hope did not mediate the relationship between creativity and maladaptive coping, supporting Hypothesis 4. Maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance or behavioral disengagement, are often less influenced by internal motivational resources and more determined by external stressors or trait vulnerabilities (Chaaya et al., 2025). This finding suggests that interventions aimed at fostering hope may primarily enhance adaptive coping without necessarily reducing maladaptive responses, highlighting the need for complementary strategies when targeting maladaptive behaviors.

These results contribute to the literature by integrating creativity and hope within the framework of coping theory. Building on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) conceptualization of coping, the findings suggest that creativity provides cognitive resources that interact with motivational factors (hope) to shape coping outcomes. Furthermore, by creating adaptive and maladaptive composites of the Brief COPE, the present study aligns with prior literature that emphasizes the importance of distinguishing coping outcomes that facilitate versus hinder well-being (Cooper et al., 2008; Litman, 2006). This approach clarifies the pathways through which psychological resources such as creativity and hope exert their influence.

The findings have meaningful applications in educational and clinical settings. Programs that cultivate creativity, particularly in academic contexts, may have the added benefit of enhancing adaptive coping strategies. Moreover, incorporating hope-building exercises into such programs could amplify the effectiveness of creativity interventions. For example, creative arts interventions designed to foster goal-setting and problem-solving may simultaneously enhance hope and encourage adaptive coping (Soysal et al., 2023). These results underscore the importance of multifaceted interventions that leverage both cognitive and motivational resources.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the correlational design limits causal inferences. Although the mediation analysis provides support for an indirect effect, longitudinal research is needed to confirm temporal sequences among creativity, hope, and coping strategies. Second, the modest internal consistency of the maladaptive coping composite may have attenuated the observed relationships. Future research should consider more reliable instruments or multi-method assessment approaches. Third, the study sample was limited to university students, potentially restricting generalizability. Examining these relationships in more diverse populations, including different age groups and cultural contexts, is warranted.

Future research could also explore additional mediators and moderators of the creativity–coping relationship, such as resilience, optimism, or personality traits like openness to experience. Investigating the interplay of these factors may provide more understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and motivational mechanisms underlying coping behaviors. Additionally, intervention studies could evaluate whether enhancing creativity and hope jointly leads to improved adaptive coping outcomes.

Overall, the present study highlights the interplay between creativity, hope, and coping strategies. The findings provide evidence that creativity contributes to adaptive coping in part through its influence on hope, while maladaptive coping appears less influenced by hope or creativity. These results support theoretical models linking cognitive and motivational resources to coping processes and suggest practical avenues for interventions aimed at enhancing student well-being. By clarifying the mechanisms through which creativity influences coping, this research advances our understanding of the dynamic interplay between cognitive, emotional, and motivational factors in stress adaptation.

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